

Carolie Joseph testifying in support of : SB1157 - An Act Concerning Funding For Legal Services And Judicial Branch Technology.

Good morning members of the committee, my name is Carolie Joseph. I am a mother of two girls, ages 4 and 6. I met my husband when I was 16, and he was 32. For years, I was trapped in an abusive relationship, because I had no idea what my rights were, or even if I had any. My husband is an American citizen and he was supposed to help me to be legal in this country, but I think he wanted to control me, and make sure I was dependent on him. The abuse started with manipulation, putting me down with words, controlling who I talked to-I was not allowed to be friends with anybody-even his family members. Since I was 18, we worked together, but I never got paid for my work-he controlled everything. I did not know how to write a check, or open a bank account. I lived in fear of losing my children and not having a home to stay in. I went to shelter in Bridgeport after I was beaten badly by my husband.

In 2005, the abuse was getting worse-happening week after week, until one snowy night at 9:00 PM in December he beat me up at a place where we were working. I decided that I had to leave-to run. I ran home in the cold and dark across town, and by the time I got to my apartment, my husband had turned off the service of my cell phone, so I could not call for help. My 16 year old stepdaughter (his daughter) who lived with us, went to our neighbor's and borrowed a phone. My stepdaughter said that if I didn't call for help, she would. I called 911.

I spent that night in the Waterbury shelter, but it wasn't safe for me in that town, so I was transported to a shelter in Bridgeport. My husband had nearly broken my hands, and hit me in the head. I stayed in shelter in Bridgeport with my children for 4 months. I didn't want to go back to my husband then, but I had to after a while, because there was no place else for me to go, based on my immigration status.

Those 4 months in the domestic violence shelter were the first that I had spend away from my husband since I was 18. I learned at the shelter that I deserved be treated differently-and I returned to my marriage wanting to be treated like an equal. I started asking questions about why he did not pay me for my work. I tried to understand and be involved in our life together, but it did not work.

Finally, in the summer of 2008, my husband went away and left me with no money and not enough food for three weeks. When he came home I told him that I needed food for the kids, and we had a big fight. My neighbor upstairs heard my husband say that he was going to kill me and she called the police. I was very afraid for myself and my children-that was a horrible time, but thank the Lord my kids slept through the ordeal, even they are not light sleepers. My husband was arrested, and the police gave me the card for Safe Haven, the women's shelter. After a day, my husband got out of jail with a partial protective order. He was still living in the house, but he was not allowed to hit me, and

yell at me. After this, he started just completely ignoring me, except for writing me notes. He wouldn't buy food for me and the kids-I had to depend on the food pantry. Things with my husband got worse, even though I had a partial protective order. My husband was arrested again, and I now have a full no contact protective order.

I finally knew that I could not go on the way I was living, so I contacted the number that the police had given me for the local domestic violence shelter, Safe Haven. They told me some of my rights, and they introduced me to attorney Joanne Lewis from Connecticut Legal Services. We worked together getting my documents, putting my papers together, and I now have authorization to work in the country. That was truly the happiest day of my life. Finally I have hope. I was also able to talk with another attorney about what my rights are regarding keeping myself and my children safe, about child support, and divorce.

Through all of this, when my husband was not giving me any money for food, I was living on the canned goods that Safe Haven, could give me. I also went to the food pantry. A friend bought me a gallon of milk every week for the kids. I tried to apply for help at the state, but they did not believe me that my husband was not living in the house with me. Even when I showed them the criminal protective order they would not help me. Safe Haven referred me to another Connecticut Legal Services attorney who explained my situation to the state. The next day after she spoke with them, a state worker was my house to see that my husband was living there. I showed him my cupboards, my fridge, I showed the worker my protective order, and explained why I needed the food, and the next week I had my food stamps. Even though I had already shown them everything and even the Domestic Violence Shelter had tried to help me, the State would not listen to me before, and without Legal Services, I would still be dependent upon the food pantry and whatever the shelter could do for me and my children.

Connecticut Legal Services has given me hope-has given me the ability to work, and has helped me with my emergency needs, and given me knowledge.. Without this program I do not know where I would be. Please support funding for this Connecticut Legal Services so that they can be a lifeline for other women in my situation. Thank you.